Spring 7-25-2017

Newspaper Construction of Homelessness in Western United States Cities

Charlie Allan Sheese
Portland State University

Newspaper Construction of Homelessness in Western United States Cities

by

Charlie Allan Sheese

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Communication

Thesis Committee:
Lee Shaker, Chair
Cynthia-Lou Coleman
Erin Spottswood

Portland State University
2017

ABSTRACT

The paths to homelessness are complex and attributable to a combination of structural issues associated with poverty that can magnify personal vulnerabilities. However, as homelessness became more prominent in news media during the 1980s, media discourse increasingly focused on personal characteristics within the homeless population which cast people as personally responsible for their plight. Simultaneously, media explanations for homelessness that called attention to structural conditions that contribute to homelessness decreased during the decade. Scholars explain this shift by situating it within the social and political climate of the time.

This study extends the line of research on homelessness in news media in order to understand how coverage of homelessness has changed between the 1980s and the 2010s. A quantitative content analysis examines newspaper articles in two cities in the western United States – Portland, Oregon, and San Diego, California – where homelessness is a prominent and enduring social and political issue. News articles are examined for changes between two time periods (1988-1990 and 2014-2016) in mentions of personal and structural factors as well as changes in the discussion of solutions for homelessness. Results show an increase over time in portrayals of structural factors that contribute to homelessness as well as an increase in talk about permanent housing solutions. However, mentions of personal problems and behaviors, such as mental illness and substance abuse, have also increased. This suggests that, while news discourse may be moving toward more nuanced portrayals that acknowledge societal factors, news media still tend to focus on characteristics of homelessness that can cast people as personally culpable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Shaker for advising me through the process of this thesis. Your calm demeanor and timely advice consistently kept me from losing my mind completely. To my other committee members, Dr. Spottswood and Dr. Coleman, thank you for investing considerable time and effort to making my project a success.

I would also like to thank my wife, Melissa, for all your help with the data-gathering process and Kyle Rush for your extensive help with the coding scheme. Finally, to the Portland State Communication Department and my fantastic graduate cohort, thank you for all your support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a complex condition and is difficult to define. The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 defined a homeless person as someone "who lacks a fixed nighttime residence and whose primary nighttime residence is a supervised public or private shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, a facility accommodating persons intended to be institutionalized, or a place not intended to be used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings" (Perl et al., 2015, p. 2). This definition provides a baseline for how the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the federal agency that most directly deals with the issue, directs funding to housing programs in order to deal with the issue.

Homelessness can be attributed to many complex and intersecting causes such as the lack of affordable housing, lack of employment opportunities, a decline in public assistance, a lack of affordable healthcare, domestic violence, mental illness, and addiction ("Homelessness in America," 2016). Thus the paths to homelessness are more likely related to issues of resources and events than individual failings (Sosin, 2003). However, news media coverage of the homeless tends to focus primarily on those characteristics within the homeless population that cast them as responsible for their own plight (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004; Shields, 2001). This is important because the way political problems are portrayed in the media can affect the public view of them (Edelman, 1988; Iyengar, 1987; Mutz, 1998) and government policy (Buck et al., 2004; Toro & Warren, 1999).

This study examines how homelessness is constructed as a social problem in news media coverage in the western United States through a content analysis of newspaper coverage in Portland, Oregon, and San Diego, California. Adding two large city papers on the West Coast extends scholarly understanding of homelessness in the media beyond national and East Coast newspapers (i.e., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*) that tend to be the focus in literature (Buck et al., 2004; Lee, Link, & Toro, 1991). In addition, homelessness is a prominent and continuous issue in media discourse within these cities and thus warrants investigation. Modern coverage (2014-2016) of homelessness is compared with coverage from the late 1980s (1988-1990) in order to revisit homelessness in the media and see how media construction of the causes of homelessness and the solutions meant to alleviate it has changed.

Results show that the discussion of causes to and solutions for homelessness changed in key ways over time. Structural issues, particularly the availability of adequate housing, increased in prominence between the time periods. Similarly, discussion of temporary shelters as solutions to the problem decreased while discussion of permanent housing solutions increased. Taken together, these findings suggest a more nuanced discourse on homelessness that connects the issue more closely to the structural issues of poverty than in the 1980s. At the same time, however, mental illness, alcoholism, and substance abuse were the three most prevalent causes mentioned in news coverage, and the prevalence of these messages increased over time. This suggests that the tendency to cast people who are homeless as personally culpable persists in modern newspapers.

CHAPTER 2: NEWS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

According to the 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), around 564,708 people are homeless in the United States: 339,075 (60%) are male and 224,344 (39.7%) are female (the remaining 1,289 reported being transgender).[1] A majority of the homeless in the U.S. are White (48.5%), followed by African American (40.5%) and people of Hispanic descent (19.9%). It is also important to consider sheltered status and household type of homeless people. Of the homeless people counted in 2016, nearly two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness (64% or 358,422 people) were individuals. 205,616 stayed in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs and 152,806 were counted in unsheltered locations. The remaining 36% were people in families with children. 90% of them were sheltered.

These figures represent about a 2% reduction since the year before and a roughly 9.5% reduction nationwide since 2011 (Henry et al., 2015). However, to claim that homelessness is decreasing throughout the country is misleading. 33 states reported decreases in overall homeless populations in 2015 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016). Pacific coast states – California (1.6%), Oregon (8.7%), and Washington (5.3%) – all saw increases in overall homeless populations. This is important considering that these same states reported decreases every previous year since 2011 (with the exception of a 3.8% increase in Washington in 2014). Homelessness is thus a salient and continuing problem in West Coast cities.

[1] These figures are based on point-in-time counts of all sheltered and unsheltered homeless in the United States in 2015

Detrimental conditions exist whether or not people talk about them; but they do not become social problems until they enter public discourse. The language used to present a condition, either through the media or through interpersonal exchange, defines the parameters of the social problem by determining who or what causes the problem, who or what is affected by it, and who has the power or authority to deal with it (Edelman, 1988). This distinction between what is a social problem and what is not matters because many of the issues (poverty, crime, etc.) that we now see as social problems are persistent and enduring. However, these problems are not always seen by the public as anything other than the natural order of things (Edelman, 1988).

News media play a vital role in constructing and defining social issues for those who do not regularly experience them. According to Mutz (1998), people gain knowledge of social issues through their own personal experience (e.g., coming in contact with a homeless person), through discussions with others regarding the issue, and through mass media accounts. Much knowledge can be gained about homelessness from personal experience and by discussing it either with those who have experienced it or those who are close to the issue (advocates, service providers, etc.). However, Richter and colleagues (2011) point out that "without the media, the majority of the public will form their opinion by the occasional experience with homeless panhandlers on street corners, squatters on sidewalks, or the homeless seeking shelter in the subway stations to get out of the cold" (p. 621). In other words, the contact people have with those labelled as "homeless" is often restricted to a small part of a vast and heterogeneous population of people struggling with housing and poverty.

This puts news media in a particularly powerful position to define social problems. Studies of agenda setting demonstrate that news media have the ability to influence the perceived importance of public issues (Cohen, 1963). In particular, the media agenda influences the public agenda, which, in turn, affects policy agendas (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). For example, in their seminal work on agenda setting theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972) compared the amount of content in news media coverage during the 1968 election cycle in Chapel Hill with what people said the most important issues were in the campaign. McCombs and Shaw found a strong correlation between what news outlets covered the most and what people stated were the most important issues.

Bunis, Yancik, and Snow (1996) demonstrate the power of news media in defining homelessness as a social problem and encouraging public attention and action. Bunis and colleagues examined the amount of attention (i.e., number of stories) given to homelessness throughout 1970s and 1980s in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *CBS News*, and the *London Times*. They then compared these trends in coverage with volunteerism of citizens at a homeless shelter and donations received by an agency in Tucson, Arizona, that serves people who are homeless. Throughout the period studied, coverage of homelessness consistently peaked from October to December and dropped in January and February. At the same time, volunteering and donations to the agency rose during the holiday months, regardless of the actual needs of the agency (Bunis et al., 1996). The study provides evidence that public understanding of homelessness as a

public problem deserving of action depends more on the prevalence of media portrayals than any substantive changes in the needs of people who experience it.

Another way in which news outlets are given the authority to define and construct homelessness is through deciding what is "newsworthy" (Gans, 2004). Coverage of homelessness, especially in local news, tends to be driven by events, whether they be instances of violence perpetrated by or against a person who is homeless, actions taken by advocacy groups, or government involvement in issues surrounding homelessness. Best (2010) demonstrates how events can affect the way homelessness is covered. In a content analysis of two Denver newspapers, Best found that stories of government activity addressing homelessness and events created by advocates are the most likely to present homelessness as a social problem in which public action is encouraged. At the same time, coverage of violence with homeless victims or perpetrators, coverage of accidents or disasters, and conflicts over the visibility or effects of homelessness are unlikely to present homelessness as a social problem. This matters because stories about crime or conflicts make up a large portion of coverage regarding homelessness (Best, 2010). Events that drive public discourse, along with the language used in media coverage, impact how a social problem is constructed.

Homogenization of News Reporting

Modern news coverage of social problems tends to be homogeneous and overly simplistic. As a result of a process of nationalization in which news content and structure favor the national over the local, reporters and editors are less likely to be members of the communities they write for, thus creating a disconnect between news sources and their

stories (Mutz, 1998). The resulting depictions of political issues often leave people with perspectives that are overly simplistic (Edelman, 1988). Simplistic views of political issues can affect the perceptions of the public and on policy makers which, in turn, can be damaging for the less visible portions of the homeless population such as children or families (see Anderson & Koblinsky, 1995).

News reporting has also moved away from objective accounts of events and toward a tradition of interpreting the news for the audience. A subtle and pervasive change that has occurred in news reporting involves the shift from event-centered reporting, where news reports on local happenings (police, crimes, fires, community politics, etc.), to general overviews of issues as well as analysis of those events (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1998). For example, instead of reporting just on a house burning down, the news today would more likely report on the widespread problem of wiring that leads to electrical fires. Newspapers at the beginning of the news era (around the 1890s) were filled with multiple items designed to appeal to various opinions of diverse individuals. Now they trend toward "grouping individual events into general, societal-level trends or themes" (Mutz, 1998).

These trends in the structure of news reporting can be particularly damaging to populations like the homeless who have little power to represent themselves. When public understanding of homelessness is restricted largely to media accounts by journalists who are removed from the communities they write about, the result could be a depiction of the problem that misrepresents the realities faced by these people. Likewise, when reporting focuses on general trends and analysis at the expense of detailed

reporting, cases and people can end up fitted within an overgeneralized conversation that also does little to acknowledge context. Scholars of framing explain this issue by distinguishing between coverage that is episodic and thematic. Iyengar (1987, 1991) points out that episodic coverage of social issues tends to highlight characteristics of homeless individuals that cast them as culpable for their own plight. At the same time, more generalized thematic coverage of the issue tends to bury a majority of the homeless population and make them invisible (Kendall, 2005). Regardless of the frame, then, the result could be a homogeneous view of homelessness among the public and public policy decisions that only target a small subset of the homeless population.

Journalistic Norms

Media coverage of social problems is informed by normative and ideological considerations of news outlets. Bennett (1996) identifies three, sometimes incompatible, normative orders that have become the basis for journalistic decisions. The first order includes norms about the journalism profession. These norms comprise journalistic traditions of objectivity and fairness in which journalists act as intermediaries between the public and the issues. The second order includes norms about the proper role of the press in politics. News organizations see their role as promoting political accountability by informing citizens about elected officials. Finally, the third order includes the normative constraints put on journalism due to the business side of journalism in which journalists are expected to report efficiently and profitably (Bennett, 1996).

These normative constraints can be damaging when it comes to reporting on social problems. As Edelman (1988) points out, "the news decides what is worth

reporting. Some people and organizations are accepted as 'news sources', and some kinds of events are assumed to be pregnant with meaning for the general public" (p. 91). Journalistic decisions on what constitutes news are based on ideological structures. Some stories will be transmitted and some will be buried. Thus news reporting can never be truly objective.

The focus of journalists on political figures can also be problematic. Political figures are often considered newsworthy and authoritative when it comes to political problems. This is a logical approach for journalists to take, but it fails to consider the perspectives of those affected by these problems. Journalists use experts as sources because they are readily available, are seen as authoritative, and "need" to be held accountable for the issue they represent (Bennett, 1996). By presuming that experts occupy a position of authority to "deal with" a social problem, other voices (particularly those most impacted by decision-making) are effectively silenced and left out of social discourse (Schneider, 2012; Shields, 2001).

Newspapers in a Changing Media Landscape

Besides the traditional structure of reporting, another major factor that shapes news coverage today is the changing media landscape. In particular, the newspaper industry is in decline. Employment at local daily newspapers decreased by over 25% from 2006 to 2010, while reporting staffs dropped by over 50% between 1985 and 2010 (Waldman, 2011). In addition, circulation of the already suffering medium continues to fall, dropping 7% over just one year between 2014 and 2015 (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016).

This drop in readership and revenue resulted from increased competition caused by a growing number of alternative news sources. While newspaper readership continues to fall, primetime viewership of the three major national news channels (CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC) rose by 8% to 3.1 million last year while daytime viewership increased to 1.9 million (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016). In addition, the use of websites, apps, and social network sites for news continues to rise. 38% of U.S. adults report using one of these platforms for news, while only 20% use newspapers (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016). These competing news sources have impacted newspapers in two ways. First, they allow people to choose news sources that align with their preferences (Waldman, 2011). Second, they allow people to pursue other interests and avoid the news altogether if they choose (Prior, 2005).

In response, today's newspapers have had to find ways to attract readers and continue functioning in the modern media landscape. To deal with these mounting problems, many newspapers have increased their online presence (Waldman, 2011). For example, *The Oregonian* shifted its format to favor online content in 2011. In addition, many news outlets, including newspapers, have altered their content to catch the attention of the audience and attract readership, resulting in a number of changes to the format of how news is reported and what is considered news.

News reporting increasingly focuses on sensationalized content (Klite, Bardwell, & Salzman, 1997). One study of homicide coverage in the *Houston Chronicle* found that coverage in the city center tended to focus very highly on homicides, regardless of where the crimes actually took place (Paulsen, 2002). This contributed to a misunderstanding

among the public of where homicides took place in Houston and could contribute to citizens' willingness to support tough crime-related measures in the city. A similar emphasis on sensational news has been observed in news coverage of homelessness, with news coverage tending to focus heavily on negative, stereotypical characteristics of homeless individuals such as mental illness, drug addiction, begging, and criminal activity, potentially leading to a fear that the homeless are to be avoided or even feared (Buck et al., 2004; Schneider, 2012; Shields, 2001; Takahashi, 1996).

Another recent development in news reporting that bears mentioning is the rise of "soft news." Soft news is defined as any news coverage that "has no clear connection to policy issues" and is characterized by stories that are sensational, personality-center, and familiar (Patterson, 2000, p. 3). News stories focusing on entertainment, celebrities, human interest stories and local events have become a prominent part of local newscasts while, at the same time, taking time away from topics such as education, elections, and the environment (Klite et al., 1997).

In sum, the current media landscape and the resulting competition for audiences and ad revenue contribute to a structure in news reporting that favors accounts of highly sensationalized news events meant to appeal to as large an audience as possible. This affects how news is constructed. Though newspapers may be in decline nationwide, they still exert a considerable amount of influence in cities they represent (Helfer, 2016). Not only do they drive other forms of coverage (Gans, 2004), they also play a major role in determining what issues local policy-makers pay attention to (Yanovitzky, 2002). Thus newspapers are instrumental in constructing social problems.

CHAPTER 3: HOMELESSNESS IN NEWS MEDIA

Research discussing news portrayals of homelessness is largely restricted to discussion of the 1980s, when the so-called "new homeless" became a prominent public issue (Buck et al., 2004; Pascale, 2005). A major focus of this research has been on news portrayals of the causes of the condition of homelessness as well as the steps taken to alleviate the problem (Lee et al., 1991; Shields, 2001). Such portrayals are important to study because they can influence popular beliefs about causation, which in turn affect how people attribute responsibility for homelessness as well as what should be done about it (Edelman, 1988; Iyengar, 1987). In general, media portrayals of homelessness tend to blame people for their own plight, while offering few effective solutions to the issue.

Increasing Coverage of Homelessness

Homelessness has long been a problem faced in U.S. cities. However, in the 1980s, the condition grew in prominence in the United States as a public problem. In a study of news and professional coverage of homelessness from 1974-2003, Buck and colleagues (2004) found that news coverage of homelessness was virtually nonexistent until 1980. However, media interest in the issue rose rapidly in the early 80's until it peaked in 1987, the same year that the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law by the Reagan administration. Coverage then declined slowly throughout the 90s. Professional, scholarly interest in homelessness followed a similar pattern, though it lagged behind slightly (Buck et al., 2004).

As media interest in homelessness grew, a pattern emerged in the rate of coverage. Bunis, Yancik, and Snow (1996) explored the ritualization of sympathy in the news and the public for homelessness based on the season of the year. Their analysis of three major U.S. news organizations - *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *CBS News* - revealed that news coverage and sympathy for the plight of the homeless is culturally associated with the holiday season. As coverage of homelessness increased during the holidays, so too did voluntarism, at least until the holidays were over. These findings illustrate that, in the United States, the holiday season is associated with a higher sense of sympathy that runs its course and drops when the season ends, despite the fairly constant needs of the homeless themselves (Bunis et al., 1996). Furthermore, coverage of homelessness during the holiday season frequently features "human interest stories" (Buck et al., 2004). Such heroic depictions of individuals are well-received as news. However, "stories about the heroic actions of ordinary people and the disasters from with they suffer… erase structural conditions from notice, even while they divert attention from the rest of the political spectacle" (Edelman, 1988, p. 99). Media coverage that elicits sympathy from the public can still distract attention from the underlying causes of social problems, as illustrated by the drop off of public sympathy following the winter months.

Another issue that has emerged regarding coverage of homelessness concerns the sources news organizations use to present the number of homeless to the American public. As the issue of homelessness in the US rose in prominence during the 1980s, news organizations utilized estimates from two major groups associated with

homelessness to make claims about the number of homeless (Hewitt, 1996). The first was a report from the Community for Creative Non-violence (CCNV) in 1982 who estimated that on any given night about 2.2 million people lacked shelter. This was followed by a number of reports, including a series of studies in 1984 by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which estimated the number of homeless between 254,000 and 586,000, depending on the report. Hewitt (1996) found that the number used by different media outlets to estimate the number of homeless was ideologically driven. More conservative news organizations like *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report* favored the lower estimates while more liberal organizations (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Newsweek*) favored the higher estimates. Media outlets present numbers and statistics as a means to reinforce the perception of objectivity (Bennett, 1996). However, the choice to report certain statistics over others is driven by considerations of ownership of the media outlets and their political ideologies.

Exploring the Causes of Homelessness

One way in which news media are instrumental in constructing the public issue of homelessness is by discussing the causes of the condition. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless ("Homelessness in America," 2016), homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. This means that the problems faced by people struggling with poverty are the same problems that drive many to face homelessness, such as the ability to "pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education" ("Homelessness in America," 2016). With this in mind, it is important to understand that the antecedents to homelessness are quite complex.

Scholars that study homelessness generally agree that the antecedents to homelessness involve a complex link between societal-level structural failings and personal vulnerabilities. Blau (1992) discusses homelessness as being, to a large degree, the result of economic conditions that disadvantage the poor. These include a continued increase in housing demand, especially for affordable low-income housing, along with diminishing supply; the loss of jobs as a result of changes in the global business market; and cutbacks in social security, food stamps, and other forms of social welfare. Lee, Tyler, and Wright (2010) add that such structural issues create vulnerabilities in persons while magnifying their consequences. For those dealing with the financial struggles that come from a tight housing market, high unemployment, and low wages, a trigger event such as a death in the family, the onset of illness, or an eviction can trigger periods of homelessness (Crane et al., 2005).

Explanations for homelessness in the literature that involve personal traits of people also acknowledge the complexities involved. For example, homelessness is often connected to some sort of mental illness, though this connection is not entirely understood (Sosin, 2003). This does not mean that people struggling with mental illness are pre-disposed to become homeless. Results of one study documenting the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in the United States showed that psychiatric disorders were equally prevalent among homeless and other low-income adults (Kessler et al., 1994).

Furthermore, the relationship between homelessness and mental illness may be explained by long-term changes in treatment of psychiatric disorders by the health care system. Jencks (1994) emphasizes the deinstitutionalization of mental health care through

closing state mental health facilities as a major contributing factor to the rise of visible homelessness in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The process of deinstitutionalization, which really started in the late 1940s, was predicated on the notion that those needing mental health treatment were better served at home with their families rather than being kept in facilities. Jencks points out that the shift away from in-patient mental health was not met with equal support for alternative forms of mental health. Toro and Warren (1999) add to this point by stating that the process of deinstitutionalization of mental health has not resulted in the closing of mental health hospitals, as is commonly believed. Rather, treatment of mental health care changed by decreasing admission length of mental health patients. Many people who suffered from mental health issues serious enough to keep them from maintaining a steady job and home were discharged from mental health facilities with nowhere to go and no form of transitional support (Jencks, 1994). It is evident, then, that the pathways to homelessness for individuals are quite complex and involve an intersection of personal circumstances and the structural issues of poverty and the health-care system.

When it comes to media, however, literature reveals a pattern of homeless portrayals that is not so complex. Research on media portrayals of homelessness shows a media discourse that focuses more on personal descriptions of individuals than calling out the societal institutions that contribute to it (Best, 2010; Buck et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1991; Shields, 2001). In a content analysis of newspaper articles in *The New York Times* throughout the 1980s, Lee and colleagues (1991) found that media discourse shifted during the decade away from discussion of structural antecedents to homelessness and

more toward what they call “deviant characteristics”. Specifically, mentions of structural factors related to homelessness decreased throughout the decade, appearing in 45% of articles mentioning cause (housing, economic conditions, deinstitutionalization, government policies, etc.) from 1988-1990 compared to 87% in the previous three-year stretch and 68.4% from 1980-1983.

At the same time, mentions of deviant characteristics increased during the decade. The three characteristics most often attributed to homelessness in Lee and colleagues’ (1991) sample of articles were mental illness (appearing in 22.1% of total articles), alcoholism (15.9%), and other substance abuse (14.9%). Mentions of mental illness remained steady throughout the decade. However, alcoholism increased considerably, appearing in 19.3% of articles from 1988-1990 compared to 9.5% from 1980-1983. Mentions of substance abuse also increased, appearing in 25.3% of articles from 1988-1990 compared to 4.8% from 1980-1983. Taken together, these findings suggest a clear movement in the 1980s from describing homelessness in terms of structural causes to portrayals of homeless people that cast them as deviant others.

Examination of other media types shows a similar trend throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. In an analysis of network news (ABC, CBS, NBC nightly news programs) from 1980 to 1993, Shields (2001) found that a common 41% of homeless people featured in nightly news stories were identified as “mentally ill”. This is important because to present homeless people as mentally ill in such a large portion of articles constructs the issue as being confined to certain type of person. As Shields (2001) argues, “portraying homelessness as a rare occurrence that only affects the mentally ill relieves

anxiety among viewers that they are far removed from such a tragedy. Furthermore, if mental disorders are the cause of homelessness, then lifestyles and established policies need not be changed" (p. 208). In other words, simplistic coverage of just a few of the many complex characteristics of homelessness runs the risk of perpetuating the notion that individuals are responsible for their own plight, and thus responsible for getting themselves out of it.

Explaining the Shift. The media's shift in construction of homelessness throughout the 1980s can be explained by changes in definition of what it meant to be homeless in the United States. Pascale (2005) discusses this shift in a discourse analysis of homelessness coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* throughout the decade. First, the term "homeless" became commonly used in the early 1980s to describe a "new" classification of poor who lost their homes as a result of a rise in unemployment during a recent recession. Newspapers commonly portrayed these new homeless more favorably than the "bums" or "vagrants" discussed in the 1970s. "Overall, newspapers used *homelessness* as a term to characterize hardworking people who lost their homes because of structural economic changes that were deserving of some new level of attention" (Pascale, 2005, pp. 253–254). This explains the increases in coverage of homelessness in the early 1980s (Buck et al., 2004) as well as the tendency of newspapers to highlight structural antecedents to the condition (Lee et al., 1991).

However, by 1983, the narrative began to change in response to statements by public officials. The distinction between the new homeless, perceived to be victims of economic conditions, and the old poor began to break down while claims about substance

abuse, mental illness, and personal choice were framed in terms of personal observations, generally made by high-profile officials" (Pascale, 2005, p. 254). In addition, homelessness was increasingly discussed alongside the crack epidemic that took hold in the mid-1980s and the increased visibility of mental illness among the homeless population as mental health institutions de-funded in-patient care (Jencks, 1994). In other words, the narrative surrounding homelessness in the 1980s was shaped by the social and political landscape of the time. This makes sense considering that discussion of homelessness is often fitted within reporting of specific events (Best, 2010).

If events and views of political leaders shaped public discourse around homeless in the 1980s, how might current events relate to modern reporting? The conversation regarding poverty in the United States has changed, especially in cities. Whereas the focus of media discourse in the 1980s was on the increased visibility of mentally ill homeless as a result of ongoing deinstitutionalization and on the crack epidemic, cities today deal with pressures that come from a shift in the urban population.

Starting in the late 1960s, the concentration of affluent households shifted to the suburbs, leaving poor neighborhoods to the center cities. In a study of changes in metropolitan poor populations between 1970 and 1990, Madden (2003) shows that the median income of central cities populations decreased as the wealthier populations moved to the suburbs. In contrast, modern cities are resurging as centers for wealth and culture in the United States (Gallagher, 2013). Between 2000 and 2013, population in U.S. cities increased by 13.9% while, at the same time, the total land area of many of the nation's largest cities remained steady or decreased slightly (Cohen, 2015). In other

words, population density in cities is increasing. At the same time, developers have increasingly invested in expensive hotels and condos that attract the wealthy back into the city (Gallagher, 2013). As a result, the cost of renting in U.S. cities has increased rapidly. For example, in Portland, Oregon, average rent increased 41% between 2010 and 2015 (Manning, 2015). The cost of owning homes in also increasing. The Case-Shiller 20-City Composite Home Price Index, a report that tracks changes over time in home prices based on repeated sales, shows a consistent increase in home buying prices (with the notable exception of 2008-2012 during the economic recession) in the 20 biggest cities in the U.S. since 2001 ("S&P/Case-Shiller 20-city composite home price index", 2017). These trends are important when considering the poor and homeless because they contribute to a housing market that is restricted to a shrinking group of people who can afford the increased costs. They could also contribute to the growing number of people who lose their homes because they cannot keep up with rent hikes or mortgage payments.

Another prominent structural issue that is closely related to increased costs of homes is the increase of other fixed expenses along with stagnant wages. In a lecture on what she calls the collapse of the middle class, Elizabeth Warren discusses her research on the changes in household expenses among U.S. families since the 1970s ("The coming collapse of the middle class", 2007). Warren shows that, while family income has increased as a whole, median individual income has remained the same. In other words, the increase in family income is not attributable to individuals making more money. Rather, it is caused by an increase of families that rely on two incomes. At the same time, mortgage payments have increased along with health insurance, childcare, and taxes.

Finally, whereas the average family committed about half their income on these fixed expenses, they now commit about three quarters of their income on them. The result, according to Warren, is an increasingly unstable living situation for an increasing number of families who, if one of the two incomes is lost, may risk complete financial collapse ("The coming collapse of the middle class", 2007). This is important to consider when discussing the causes of homelessness. When more people are at risk of bankruptcy and financial collapse, homelessness becomes a potential reality for a larger portion of the population.

These, of course, are not the only factors that contribute to poverty and homelessness in the United States. As previously mentioned, the pathways to episodes of homelessness as well as chronic homelessness are complex and each case involves a multitude of factors (Lee et al., 2010). However, they are important structural issues that affect homelessness in the United States and, perhaps more importantly, are prominent political issues in U.S. cities. Insofar as the conversation about homelessness in media accounts during the 1980s was driven by political issues of the time, a changed political landscape should lead to a public conversation on homelessness that takes these structural issues into account more often than before. In other words, if homelessness was attributed to the crack epidemic and deinstitutionalization of mental health care, it follows that modern coverage should have shifted to talk of economic conditions, rising costs of living, and financial instability that can make losing a job have disastrous consequences. If this shift has not occurred and the causes associated with homelessness have remained the same, this would suggest a construction of the issue that continues to cast individuals

as responsible for their plight and, therefore, not deserving of help (Iyengar, 1987; Shields, 2001).

This study examines two related predictions about how media discourse regarding the causes of homelessness may have changed between the 1980s and today. First, coverage of the personal causes for homelessness often seen in the news of the 1980s will be less prevalent in the 2010s. A media narrative that mentions mental illness, drugs, and alcohol less often in relation to homelessness would indicate a construction of homelessness that does not place as much responsibility on individuals and connects homelessness more broadly to poverty.

> **H1**: Coverage of homelessness at $T_{2014\text{-}2016}$ will mention (A) mental illness, (B) alcohol, and (C) drugs in relation to homelessness less often than at $T_{1988\text{-}1990}$.

Second, coverage of homelessness will include mentions of structural causes more often in modern coverage than in the 1980s. Since city leaders are especially concerned today with issues of living costs and wages that come with population increase, it follows that the narrative around homelessness will return to structural explanations.

> **H2**: Coverage of homelessness at $T_{2014\text{-}2016}$ will mention (A) housing, (B) job loss, and (C) health costs as causes of homelessness more often than at $T_{1988\text{-}1990}$.

News Portrayals of Solutions

A common statement in the news regarding solutions is that not enough is being done about homelessness (Best, 2010; Lee et al., 1991). In their analysis of articles in *The New York Times*, Lee and colleagues (1991) found that, though policies, programs, or services meant to alleviate homelessness appeared in 87% of articles in the 1980s, the types of solutions emphasized changed over time. Long-term or transitional housing

appeared in a much smaller portion of articles that mentioned solutions from 1988-1990 (39.8%) than it did from 1980-1983 (71.4%). At the same time, the proportion of articles that mentioned emergency shelter increased between 1980-1983 (38.1%) and 1988-1990 (44.6%). Other policies and programs that appeared less frequently included food and clothing assistance, health care services, job provisioning or training, and financial assistance (Lee et al., 1991).

This could reflect official views on homelessness that are more concerned with temporary stop-gaps than the solutions they profess to be seeking. Despite the multitude of programs and services available to aid the homeless, most federal funding was allocated to emergency shelter immediately following the passage of the McKinney-Vento Act (Toro & Warren, 1999). Between 2007 and 2015, emergency shelter beds increased in the United States by 25%, while available transitional housing units decreased by 23% (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016).

Emergency shelters are necessary services that are crucial to getting people off the streets, especially during extreme weather. However, emergency shelters are, at best, temporary solutions for people struggling with homelessness (Toro & Warren, 1999). At worst, they may perpetuate homelessness by making living on the street a more viable option for people than the difficult process of obtaining and maintaining consistent housing (Jencks, 1994). This study examines the prevalence of solutions posed in newspaper articles to see what solutions are commonly posed in local news in West Coast cities as well as to see if modern coverage of solutions to homelessness differs from coverage of the late 1980s.

RQ1*:* What solutions are discussed in newspaper coverage of homelessness in West Coast cities?

RQ2*:* How does modern coverage of solutions differ from coverage of the late 1980s?

CHAPTER 4: METHOD

This quantitative content analysis compares local newspaper coverage of homelessness across two west coast city newspapers – *The Oregonian* and *The San Diego Union-Tribune* – and over two time periods – 1988-1990 ($T_{88\text{-}90}$) and 2014-2016 ($T_{14\text{-}16}$). Using two newspapers enables examination of potential variation in public discourse around homelessness as a social problem in two cities with differing political climates. Understanding how different geographical and political areas discuss homelessness in the media is important because such discussion can have a direct impact on the lives of people struggling with homelessness in these areas, especially when those people are given very little license to speak for themselves.

A sample of the two papers within the two time periods is analyzed for the prevalence of the various causes and solutions for homelessness derived in the literature (Buck et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1991). Causes and solutions are then compared across $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$ as well as between news sources to assess differences in media discourse between the 1980s and the current time. In this way, the current study aims to replicate and extend prior research on homelessness in the news (Lee et al., 1991) while giving empirical evidence of how the news constructs homelessness as a social issue today.

Sampling

Data were gathered using the online database NewsBank through the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon. NewsBank was chosen because it included full-text (with no images) articles from *The San Diego Union-Tribune* as far back as 1985 and from *The Oregonian* as far back as 1987. The keyword search “homeless* OR transient*

OR beggar*" was used to retrieve all articles that mentioned homelessness within the time periods. A number of other search terms were tried to achieve an inclusive sample. However, no additional search term increased the return of articles beyond these three. For example, the term "houseless" was mentioned only once in The Oregonian between 2014 and 2016, and it was situated within an article that already mentioned "homeless."

The initial search results yielded a large number of duplicates and articles that do not directly address homelessness. To account for this, I and a trained coder pre-screened the articles to determine whether they should be included in the final corpus of texts (see Appendix A for the data exclusion instruction sheet). For articles to be included, homelessness or people who are homeless had to be mentioned within the articles. Articles were removed if they did not mention homelessness at all, losing a home as the result of a disaster (fire, hurricane, etc.), or if homelessness was only mentioned as part of a political agenda (e.g., a politician mentions "dealing with homelessness" in a speech). In addition, since a major goal of this study is to compare coverage between cities, only coverage of homelessness within the city or general discussion of homelessness was include. Thus stories that discussed homeless incidents in other cities and international stories were removed.

All remaining articles were deemed eligible for analysis. It is important to note that many of the final articles mentioned homelessness only briefly. Initially, I removed articles if homelessness was not the principal focus. However, this criterion proved problematic since it was subjective and difficult to define what constitutes a "principal focus" in news content that often presents multiple topics in a single article. In addition,

since the objective of this study is to determine which causes and solutions are discussed more often than others, removing these articles may systematically bias the sample in favor of certain types of news articles that provide certain causes and solutions. Thus it was important that articles be included that only mentioned homelessness in passing, but did not meet any of the specific exclusion criteria described above. Finally, a stratified random sample of 20% of articles was drawn from each year using an online random number generator (random.org)[2]. The total number of articles analyzed is 558 (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the sampling process).

Table 1

Number of Articles in Each Sampling Stage

	Initial search results		**After include/exclude**		**Final Sample (*N* = 558)**	
	SD	**OR**	**SD**	**OR**	**SD**	**OR**
1988	1177	505	347	240	63	44
1989	1116	379	355	201	64	33
1990	1272	403	424	207	73	39
2014	718	385	258	100	46	20
2015	749	435	219	176	42	31
2016	1010	442	381	208	66	37

Content coding

Coding categories. I coded content within each article using a modified and expanded version of the categorical coding scheme set up by Lee and colleagues (1991). This typology of causes and characteristics associated with homelessness remains the most exhaustive typology available and has been used by other researchers (Best, 2010; Buck et al., 2004) in more recent content analyses of media portrayals of homeless. Since

[2] Random.org listed a specified number of integers within the range of each population. Some integers were repeated, resulting in a small number of samples that did not reach 20%.

my focus is on causal attributions and presented solutions, I focused my analysis on variables that fit into three general categories: structural reasons for homelessness, personal reasons for homelessness, and solutions given.

The first category of coding variables I analyze includes seven structural reasons for homelessness adapted from Lee and colleagues (1991). Structural reasons for homelessness are those that call attention to societal and economic conditions as well as the results of government action and policies that can drive people struggling with poverty into homelessness. To point out such factors in news coverage draws attention to role of complex structural conditions that contribute to homelessness and help construct the issue as if it could happen to anyone (Blau, 1992). Seven structural factors analyzed in this study are described in Table 2.

Table 2

Structural Factors for Homelessness Variables

Label	Variable Name	Description
ST1	Housing	Mentions of housing/rent costs, "housing crisis", housing availability for homeless, need/lack of housing, evictions, etc.
ST2	Economic conditions	Mentions of good/poor economy, etc.
ST3	Deinstitutionalization	Mentions of de-funding/closing mental health institutions, lack of access to mental health care facilities/treatments, etc.
ST4	Government action	Mentions of government actions, policies, or stance; tax increases, zoning laws, etc.
ST5	Job loss	Mentions of persons identified as homeless losing jobs, lay-offs, unemployment statistics, etc.
ST6	Health costs	Mentions of costs for medical goods, hospital bills, general health cost statistics, struggles paying medical bills, etc.
ST7	Other	Other structural reasons for homelessness not mentioned above

I also analyze the depiction of factors for homelessness that call attention to personal circumstances and "deviant characteristics". Presenting the following characteristics to the homeless in news coverage can cast people as personally

responsible for their plight by constructing the homeless as choosing their condition through lifestyle decisions or poor decisions. Eight personal factors for homelessness are described in Table 3.

Table 3

Personal Factors for Homelessness Variables

Label	Variable Name	Description
PE1	Mental illness	Mentions of mental illness, "struggling with mental illness", mental illness statistics, etc.
PE2	Physical illness/disability	Mentions of physical illness or disability of person or persons identified as homeless, disability statistics, etc.
PE3	Personal choice	Mentions of people or groups choosing to be homeless (e.g., "_____ chose a life on the streets"), "homeless lifestyle", etc.
PE4	Family/household breakup	Mentions of divorce/separation, death of a family member, general family "issues" of homeless individuals/groups, etc.
PE5	Laziness	Mentions of "lazy people", "just get a job", "free-loaders", etc.
PE6	Alcohol	Mentions of "alcohol", "alcoholism", "alcoholic", "drinking", etc.
PE7	Drugs	Mentions of "drugs", "drug addiction", "substance abuse", etc. –OR- description of "used needles", "syringes", etc.
PE8	Lack of talent	Stories mentioning lack of work skills, lack of talent, lack of education, etc.
PE9	Other	Other personal reasons for homelessness not mentioned above

Finally, I examine the programs and services most commonly posed to alleviate homelessness or serve these people. These categories are derived from Lee and colleagues (1991) and include mostly actions taken by government (through funding of monetary aid programs, funding for housing or shelter, and assistance in the form of various social services) and programs set up by advocacy or charity organizations. Actions or events by service providers tend to drive media coverage of the issue of homelessness and, therefore, make up most news reporting on homelessness solutions (Bennett, 1996; Best, 2010; Lee et al., 1991). Eight solutions for homelessness analyzed in this study are described in Table 4. See also Appendix B for a detailed description of

the coding procedure and Appendix C for an expanded description of each coding category as well as examples from news articles.

Table 4

Homelessness Solutions Variables

Label	Variable Name	Description
WD1	Short-term shelters	Mentions of missions, overnight shelters, short-term shelters, emergency shelters, "not enough/need more shelters", "shelter beds", "shelter pods", short-term dormitories, etc.
WD2	Long-term housing	Mentions of long-term housing facilities or programs, public housing, transitional housing, "housing first" programs, rent-controlled housing, groups homes (youth), etc.
WD3	Monetary aid	Mention of direct monetary aid programs, welfare, etc.
WD4	Food/clothing assistance	Mentions of divorce/separation, death of a family member, general family "issues" of homeless individuals/groups, etc.
WD5	Personal charity	Mentions of personal acts of tangible aid or charity (giving money or items)
WD6	Job provisioning	Mentions of programs to gain employment and job skills, providing jobs, companies hiring the homeless, etc.
WD7	Education	Educational programs/services, GED programs, enrollment in educational institutions, etc.
WD8	Medical services	Increased funding for medical facilities, providing mental health and/or medical services, Mental health or medical outreach, etc.
WD9	Other	Solutions not mentioned in the above categories

Coding units. The primary goal of this study is to determine the number of articles in news coverage that discuss topics related to causes of homelessness and solutions given for homelessness. It is also important, however, to understand the amount of attention given to those topics within articles. For this reason, I coded newspaper articles for cause and solution at the level of the sentence as a single syntactical unit (Krippendorff, 2013; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). Coding each sentence allowed me to go beyond simple tallies of whether or not articles mentioned causes and solutions of homelessness. I was also able to assess potential differences in emphasis given to the coded topics within articles.

For each sentence within each article, I assessed whether or not each of the coding categories was present. Each sentence was tallied for a single code only once, regardless of how many times, within that sentence, the coded topic was mentioned (e.g., the following sentence lists a number of temporary homeless shelters within the same sentence: “Many of Portland's homeless get cover for the night from a network of shelters in or near downtown, including Baloney Joe's, Burnside Projects Emergency Shelter, the Portland Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army Harbor Light Center”). However, more than one code could be applied to a single sentence if that sentence mentioned multiple coding categories (e.g., “Hundreds of homeless women like Bolton pass through the city's homeless shelters each year, and 20 percent to 50 percent of them are mentally ill and in need of treatment, stable housing and around-the-clock supervision”).

Pre-testing and Inter-coder reliability. An independent coder analyzed a sub-set of sampled articles for the purposes of inter-coder reliability. As Neuendorf (2002) points out, “the process of coder training is inextricably linked with the process of codebook development” (p. 134). Following Neuendorf’s (2002) guidelines for coder training, training sessions involved guided practice using the codebook to code small samples of articles along with discussion and comparison of tallies. We conducted eight such training sessions during which I revised the codebook to remove ambiguities or overlapping codes. Pre-testing also revealed a number of causes and solutions not originally specified in Lee and colleagues’ (1991) study, but that the coder and I decided warranted examination. Added codes included “job loss” (ST5), “health costs” (ST6), “personal charity” (WD5), and “education” (WD7).

Following the eight coder training sessions, both the coder and I analyzed a randomly sampled sub-set of 10% (n = 59) of the final sample for reliability. Reliability coefficients were calculated using *Krippendorff's alpha* (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Refer to the right-hand columns of tables 2, 3, and 4 for a list of reliability coefficients. It is important to point out that the minimum reliability coefficient generally accepted for tentative conclusions is .667 (Krippendorff, 2006). Three coding variables – alcohol (PE6; α = .61), food/clothing assistance (WD4; α = .63), and personal charity (WD5; α = .65) – fell just short of this benchmark. The principal reason for this was low sample size (none of the 3 variables appeared in more than 14 articles). However, there were also a few anomalies in which the coder and I interpreted similar codes differently. For example, in one case, the coder interpreted a story about a student passing out sandwiches as food service, while I coded the story as personal charity. Such disagreements were rare and promptly corrected. Nonetheless, these variables were included in analysis due to time constraints and because they approached the minimum coefficient.

One important coding variable – long-term housing (WD2) – did not achieve inter-coder reliability in the first attempt, with the coefficient α = .46. For this variable, the coder and I conducted 2 additional coding sessions to assess agreement issues. We then analyzed an additional subset of 10% of articles from the sample (n = 61), assessing reliability for just the one variable. After the second pass, long-term housing achieved acceptable reliability (α = .76).

Eleven of the original 22 coding categories –deinstitutionalization (ST3), government action (ST4), physical illness/disability (PE2), personal choice (PE3),

family/household breakup (PE4), laziness (PE5), lack of talent (PE8), and monetary aid (WD3) – were removed during preliminary analysis due to very low frequencies and low resulting *Krippendorff's α* coefficients. The remaining 11 coding categories were included for analysis. Table 5 shows *K-alpha* coefficients for these remaining variables.

Table 5

K-alpha Coefficients for Analyzed Variables

Variable	*α*
Structural Causes	
Housing	.76
Job Loss	.73
Health Costs	.66
Personal Causes	
Mental Illness	.78
Alcohol	.61
Drugs	.79
Solutions	
Short-term Shelters	.68
Long-term Housing	.76
Food/Clothing Assistance	.63
Personal Charity	.65
Job Provisioning/Training	.9
Education	.81
Medical Services	.73

Analysis

Changes across the two time periods were analyzed for both *The Oregonian* and *The San Diego Union-Tribune* separately. The sample was thus split into four groups – *The Oregonian* 1988-1990 (OR88-90), *The Oregonian* 2014-2016 (OR14-16), *The San Diego Union-Tribune* 1988-1990 (SD88-90), and *The San Diego Union-Tribune* 2014-2016 (SD14-16) – and analysis was conducted treating each group as a separate sample.

Newspaper articles vary in their presentation of homelessness causes and solutions depending on the context in which they are written. As a result, the sampling distribution for content analysis data tends to be heavily skewed (due to the large number of "zeros" for articles that do not mention specific causes or solutions). This makes it problematic to treat count data in content analysis as ratio level data, as it will most likely violate the assumption of normal distribution. Thus each cause and solution category was dichotomized (0 = Not Present, 1 = Present) for analysis and time periods were compared using chi-square tests of independence for each variable. If the difference was significant, supplemental independent-samples *t*-tests were then used to assess potential differences in "intensity" (meaning the number of sentences mentioning the coded cause or solution) among articles that mentioned the coded variables at least 1 time. In doing so, the goal was to understand changes over time in the proportion of articles that mention specific causes and solutions as well as possible changes in emphasis placed on those causes within articles. Levels of statistical significance were set *a priori* at .05. Bivariate analysis was conducted using SPSS.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Table 6

Frequency of Articles Mentioning Causes and Solutions

	The Union-Tribune		*The Oregonian*		
	1988-90 (*n* = 200)	**2014-16** (*n* = 154)	**1988-90** (*n* = 116)	**2014-16** (*n* = 88)	**Total** (*N* = 558)
Structural Causes					
Housing	17 (8.5%)	12 (4.7%)	10 (8.6%)	24 (27.3%)	63 (11.3%)
Job Loss	11 (5.5%)	9 (5.8%)	10 (8.6%)	6 (6.8%)	36 (6.5%)
Health Costs	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	4 (0.7%)
Personal Causes					
Mental Illness	18 (9%)	18 (11.7%)	7 (6%)	12 (13.6%)	55 (10%)
Alcohol	16 (8%)	20 (13%)	6 (5.2%)	5 (5.7%)	47 (8.4%)
Drugs	29 (14.5%)	32 (20.8%)	12 (10.3%)	17 (19.3%)	90 (16.1%)
Solutions					
Short-term Shelters	67 (33.5%)	33 (21.4%)	56 (48.3%)	34 (38.6%)	190 (34.1%)
Long-term Housing	50 (25%)	53 (34.4%)	32 (27.6%)	37 (42%)	172 (30.8%)
Food/Clothing	47 (23.5%)	33 (21.4%)	28 (24.1%)	15 (17%)	123 (22%)
Personal Charity	25 (12.5%)	20 (13%)	14 (12.1%)	3 (3.4%)	62 (11.1%)
Job Provisioning	33 (16.5%)	15 (9.7%)	15 (12.9%)	6 (6.8%)	69 (12.4%)
Education	12 (6%)	13 (8.4%)	6 (5.2%)	7 (8%)	38 (6.8%)
Medical Services	21 (10.5%)	16 (10.4%)	14 (12.1%)	10 (11.4%)	57 (10.2%)

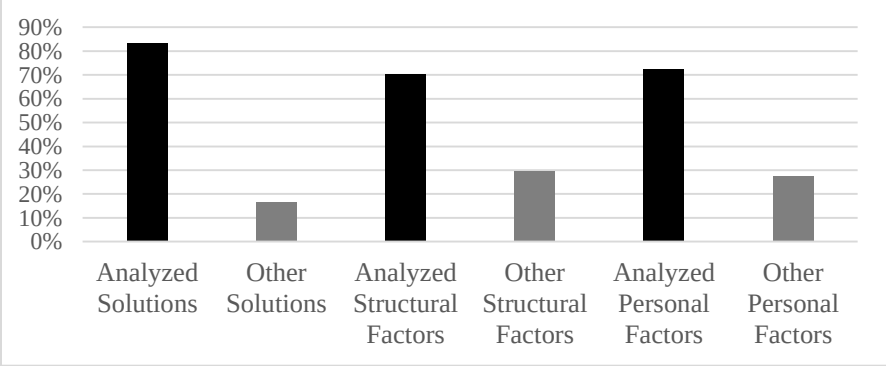
The numbers represent total articles in the group that mention the category and the percentages within each group are shown in parentheses.

Table 6 shows the frequency at which each of the 6 analyzed causes and 7 analyzed solutions appeared in newspaper articles across the four groups. The 11 categories included for analysis accounted for a vast majority of mentions of causes and solutions in the total sample of news articles. Structural factors for homelessness appeared in 344 sentences across all articles in the sample. Of those, housing, job loss, and health costs accounted for 70% of structural causes mentioned. Personal factors for homelessness were discussed more often in media coverage, appearing in 480 total sentences. Mental illness, alcohol, and drugs accounted for 73% of these sentences personal attributions of cause. Finally, solutions appeared the most often, showing up in

1,723 sentences across the six years of coverage in the two newspapers. Of these, short-term shelter, long-term housing, food/clothing assistance, personal charity, job provisioning/training, education, and medical assistance made up 86% of total sentences. These data show that media accounts of homelessness in West Coast newspapers focus primarily on the few causes and solutions included for analysis in this study. Figure 1 shows the relative percentage of causes and solutions included for analysis against all others that appeared in the sample.

Figure 1

Comparison of Analyzed Variables and Excluded Variables

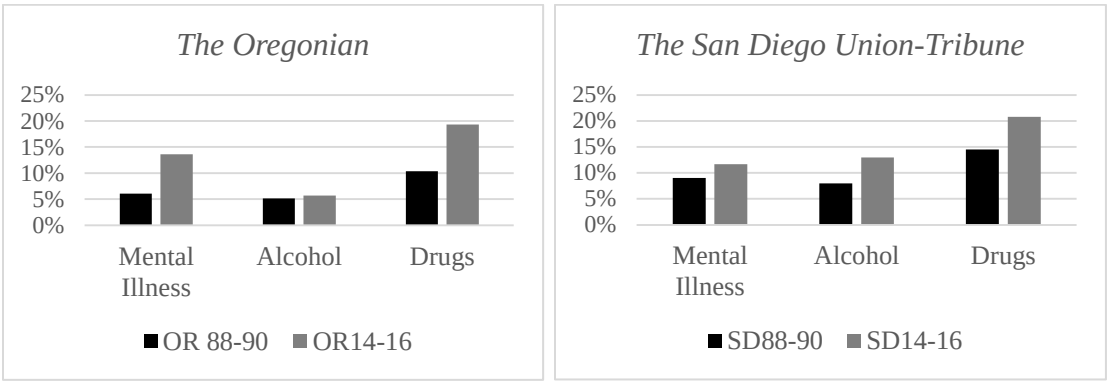


H1: Personal Attributions of Cause

Hypothesis 1 examined three personal reasons commonly attributed to homelessness – mental health issues (H1A), consumption of alcohol (H1B), and drug use (H1C) – and predicted that coverage of these three categories would decrease between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$. Figure 1 shows trends across time for personal cause variables in both newspapers.

Figure 2

Comparisons across Time for Percent of Articles Mentioning Personal Causes



Chi square analysis revealed a significant change across time periods in mentions of personal causes overall in one of the two newspapers. Contrary to expectations, OR_{14-16} (n = 23, 26.4% of articles) mentioned personal attributions of cause significantly more frequently than OR_{88-90} (n = 17, 14.7% of articles), χ^2 (1) = 4.36, $p < .05$. SD_{14-16} (n = 41, 26.6% of articles) also mentioned personal causes slightly more frequently than SD_{88-90} (n = 40, 20% articles in sample), though the difference was not statistically significant. Taken together, these findings suggest no support for H1. In contrast, there is evidence that the frequency at which personal causes are attributed to homelessness increased over time, though this change was only significant in *The Oregonian*. Changes across time were also assessed for individual personal cause variables. H1A predicted that mentions of mental illness would decrease between T_{88-90} and T_{14-16}. However, chi square analysis revealed no significant change for any of the three personal cause variables in either newspaper.

Changes in the average number of sentences mentioning causes were also examined. To do so, independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to assess the mean

difference in number sentences mentioning causes between articles that mentioned personal causes at least 1 time. Table 7 summarizes mean scores for each of the three personal cause variables analyzed. Results show no significant differences in the average number of sentences mentioning mental illness, alcohol, or drugs in homelessness articles between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$.

Table 7

Mean Scores for Sentences within Articles Mentioning Personal Causes

	The Union-Tribune		*The Oregonian*	
	1988-90	**2014-16**	**1988-90**	**2014-16**
Personal Causes				
Mental Illness	2.67 (2.14)	1.67 (1.28)	2.29 (2.98)	1.67 (1.72)
Alcohol	1.38 (.89)	1.1 (.31)	3 (3.35)	1 (0)
Drugs	1.83 (2.02)	1.34 (.75)	2.5 (2.58)	2.41 (3.64)

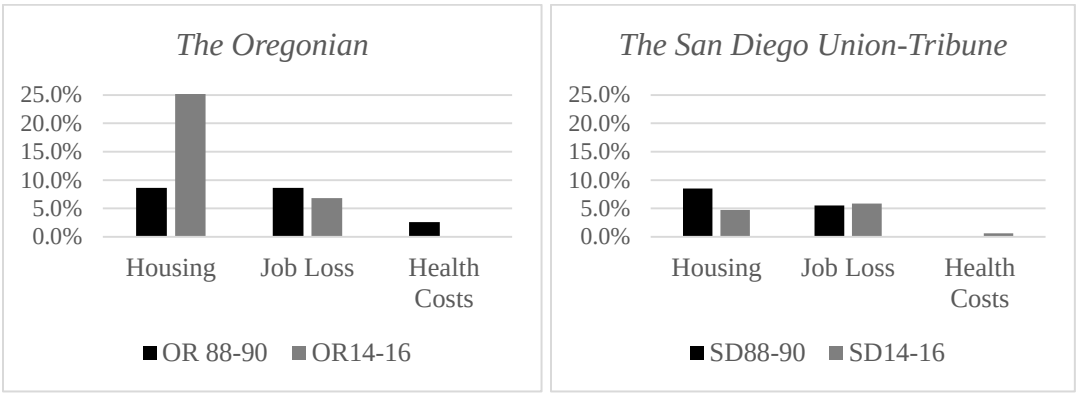
The numbers represent mean scores for each group and standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

H2: Structural Causes of Homelessness

Hypothesis 2 predicted that coverage of three structural causes commonly attributed to homelessness – affordability or availability of housing (ST1), loss of job (ST5), and health costs (ST6) –would increase between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$. Figure 2 shows trends across time for structural cause variables in both newspapers.

Figure 3

Comparisons across Time for Percent of Articles Mentioning Structural Causes



A chi-square analysis comparing the number of articles that mentioned at least one of the three structural causes revealed a significant change across time in 1 of the 2 newspapers. $OR_{14\text{-}16}$ (n = 27; 30.7% articles in sample) mentioned structural causes of homelessness in significantly more articles than $OR_{88\text{-}90}$ (n = 17; 14.7% articles in sample), χ^2 (1) = 7.6, p < .01. However, $SD_{14\text{-}16}$ did not differ significantly from $SD_{88\text{-}90}$ in prevalence of structural causes overall.

H2A predicted a significant increase in mentions of housing as a cause. As expected, a chi-square analysis revealed that $OR_{14\text{-}16}$ (n = 24; 27.3% articles in sample) mentioned housing in a significantly higher proportion of articles than $OR_{88\text{-}90}$ (n = 10; 8.6% articles in sample), χ^2 (1) = 12.53, p < .001. The same change was not present in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. H2B and H2C also predicted an increase in prevalence of job loss and health costs presented as causes of homelessness. No significant difference existed between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$ for either variable in either newspaper.

In additions, independent-samples *t*-tests tested whether or not the time periods differed in the average number of sentences mentioning structural causes. Table 8

summarizes mean scores for each of the three personal cause variables analyzed. Results show no significant differences in the average number of sentences mentioning housing, job loss, or health costs in homelessness articles between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$.

Table 8

Mean Scores for Sentences within Articles Mentioning Structural Causes

	The Union-Tribune		*The Oregonian*	
	1988-90	**2014-16**	**1988-90**	**2014-16**
Structural Causes				
Housing	2.59 (2.79)	3.58 (3.26)	3.5 (3.53)	2.75 (2.4)
Job Loss	1.36 (.51)	1.22 (.44)	1.5 (.71)	1.33 (.82)
Health Costs	0 (NA)	1 (NA[3])	1 (NA)	0 (NA)

The numbers represent total articles in the group that mention the category and the percentages within each sample are shown in parentheses.

Presenting Solutions

Research questions 1 and 2 examined solutions that tend to be posed in media coverage for homelessness and potential changes in prevalence of those solutions between $T_{88\text{-}90}$ and $T_{14\text{-}16}$. As previously mentioned, 86% of the total mentions of solutions to homelessness fit into one of seven categories set up by Lee and colleagues (1991): short-term shelters, long-term housing, food/clothing assistance, personal charity, job provision/training, education, and medical services. Results are presented by newspaper.

RQ1. Research question one asked what solutions appear in news coverage. Long-term housing (29.1%) appeared in the largest percentage of articles in the newspaper (N = 354), followed closely by short-term shelter (28.2%) and food/clothing assistance (22.6%). The remaining solutions include job provisioning/training (13.6%),

[3] The single case that mentioned health costs in SD14-16 did so in 2 sentences.

medical services (13.3%), personal charity (12.7%), and education (7.1%). *The Oregonian* differed slightly from *The Union-Tribune*, though the general trend was similar. Short-term shelters (44.1%) appeared in the highest percentage of articles, followed by long-term housing (33.8%) and food/clothing assistance (21.1%). Of the remaining categories, medical services appeared in 16.2%, job provisioning/training appeared in 10.3%. personal charity appeared in 8.3%, and education appeared in 6.4% of articles.

RQ2. Research question 2 asked what changes occurred in news coverage of solutions between $T_{1988\text{-}1990}$ and $T_{2014\text{-}2016}$. To assess RQ2 for the *Union-Tribune,* chi-square analysis examined changes between $SD_{88\text{-}90}$ and $SD_{14\text{-}16}$ of the percent of articles mentioning solutions. Analysis revealed that $SD_{14\text{-}16}$ mentioned short-term shelters as a solution to homelessness significantly less frequently than $SD_{88\text{-}90}$, χ^2 (1) = 6.26, $p < .05$. By contrast, the percentage of articles mentioning long-term housing increased between $SD_{88\text{-}90}$ and $SD_{14\text{-}16}$, though the difference was not statistically significant. The 5 remaining solution variables showed no significant change in newspaper coverage. See Figure 4 for comparisons across time of each of the solution variables in the newspaper.

Articles that mentioned the 7 solution variables at least 1 time were also assessed for differences in the average number of sentences stating these solutions. Independent-samples *t*-tests revealed no significant differences between $SD_{88\text{-}90}$ and $SD_{14\text{-}16}$. See Table 9 for mean scores for sentences that mentioned solutions in *The San Diego Union-Tribune.*

Figure 4

Comparisons across Time for Articles Mentioning Solutions in The Union-Tribune

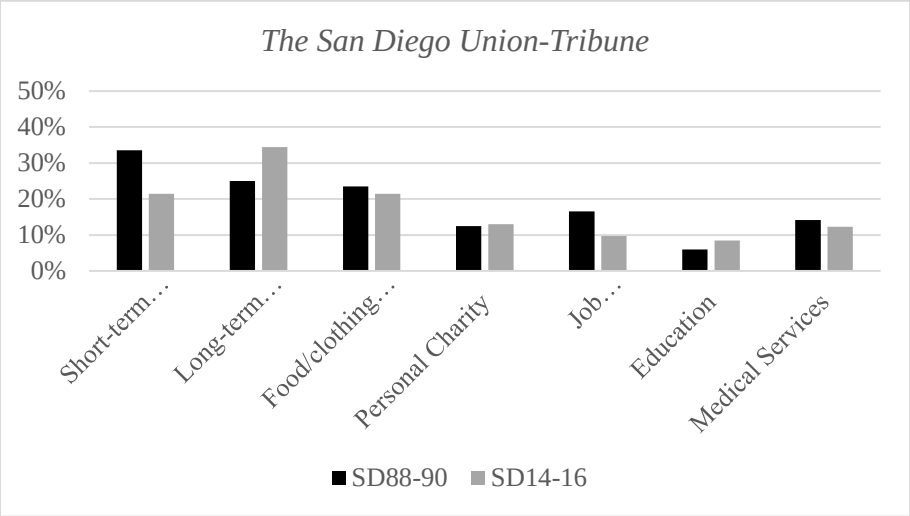


Figure 5

Comparisons across Time for Articles Mentioning Solutions in The Oregonian

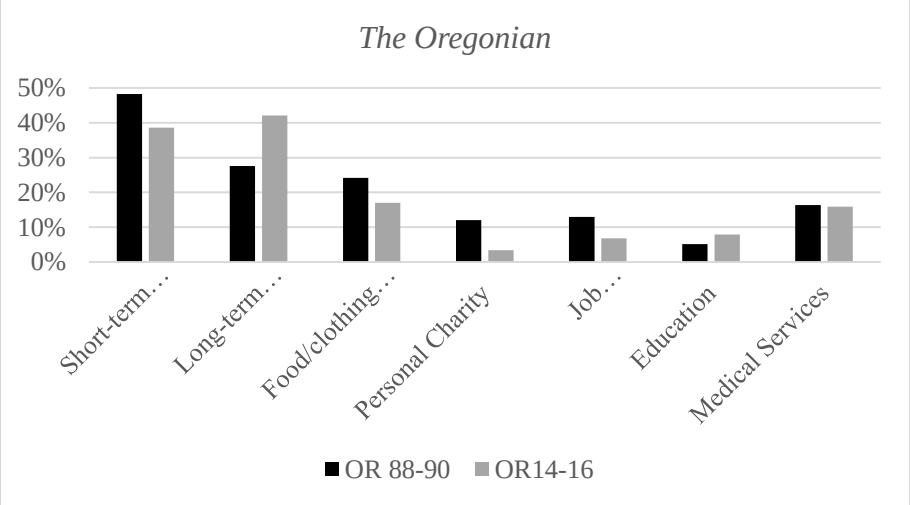


Table 9

Mean Scores for Sentences within Articles Mentioning Solutions in Union-Tribune

	1988-90	**2014-16**
Solutions		
Short-term Shelters	3.84 (3.48)	3.58 (3.26)
Long-term Housing	2.98 (3.8)	3.51 (3.86)
Food/Clothing Assistance	4.4 (3.74)	2.88 (3.62)
Personal Charity	3.48 (2.74)	3.2 (3.5)
Job Provisioning/Training	1.45 (1.18)	1.73 (1.58)
Education	5.33 (6.1)	3.1 (4.03)
Medical Services	2.29 (2.32)	1.95 (1.58)

The numbers represent total articles in the group that mention the category and the percentages within each sample are shown in parentheses.

Chi square analysis also revealed changes in coverage of solutions over time in *The Oregonian*. A significantly higher percentage of articles mentioned long-term housing as a solution to homelessness at $OR_{14\text{-}16}$ compared to $OR_{88\text{-}90}$, χ^2 (1) = 4.67, $p < .05$. In addition, the proportion of articles mentioning personal charity as a solution to homelessness significantly decreased between $OR_{88\text{-}90}$ and $OR_{14\text{-}16}$, χ^2 (1) = 4.91, $p < .05$. Mentions of short-term shelters, food and clothing assistance, and job provisioning or training also decreased slightly, though none of the differences were statistically significant. See Figure 5 for comparisons across time of each of the solution variables in the newspaper.

Within articles that mentioned solutions at least once, pair-wise comparisons were made to determine if the attention paid to these solutions changed over time. Independent-samples *t*-tests revealed no significant change between OR88-90 and OR14-16 in average sentences that mentioned the 7 analyzed solutions (see Table 10).

Table 10

Mean Scores for Sentences within Articles Mentioning Solutions in The Oregonian

	1988-90	**2014-16**
Solutions		
Short-term Shelters	4.2 (3.7)	3.94 (4.47)
Long-term Housing	3.72 (5.0)	4.84 (5.79)
Food/Clothing Assistance	2.36 (2.38)	1.67 (1.23)
Personal Charity	3.21 (.62)	4.33 (3.51)
Job Provisioning/Training	1.33 (.62)	1.67 (1.21)
Education	6.33 (6.1)	4.57 (3.55)
Medical Services	1.79 (1.51)	2.21 (2.36)

The numbers represent total articles in the group that mention the category and the percentages within each sample are shown in parentheses.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Local news coverage of homelessness is important because news organizations play a vital role in presenting and constructing social problems to people who do not have personal experience with them (Mutz, 1998; Richter et al., 2011). Previous studies show that, in the 1980s, the conversation regarding homelessness in the media shifted from characterizing the homeless as hard-working people affected by economic conditions toward attributing homelessness to mental illness and drug abuse (Jencks, 1994; Lee et al., 1991; Pascale, 2005; Shields, 2001). Findings here show that these trends continue in modern media. Coverage of homelessness is still largely restricted to presenting a few factors that contribute to the social problem, many of which can cast people as personally responsible for their condition. However, there are also a number of key changes in discussion of causes that could suggest that media discourse concerning homelessness is affected by the greater social and political issues of the time.

Homogenized Coverage of Homelessness

Results from this study suggest that coverage of homelessness continues to be largely restricted to a few topics. First, local newspaper coverage of homelessness discussed solutions much more often than causes. This is consistent with Lee and colleagues' (1991) findings from national news. Following the passage of the Mckinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 1987 when government programs began to increase, the conversation quickly shifted toward what should be done about homelessness more than what causes it. That trend continues today in local media coverage.

However, when causes are discussed, a majority of newspaper coverage tends to focus on just a few. Here, 70% of articles that mentioned any structural cause of homelessness focused on either housing, job loss, or health costs. In addition, mental illness, alcohol, and drugs accounted for 73% of personal explanations for homelessness. This is important because it speaks to a largely homogeneous media discourse on homelessness that obscures the complex nature of the condition.

The three personal attributes analyzed were discussed in considerably more articles than structural causes in both modern coverage and coverage from the late 1980s. In other words, if a person read a story about homelessness in either time period and in either newspaper, they were more likely to see mental illness, the use of drugs, or consumption of alcohol associated with homelessness than discussion of structural conditions that drive many people onto the streets. This is consistent with literature stating that the media tend to cast people struggling with homelessness as personally responsible for their own plight by pointing out "deviant characteristics" that cast them as other (Iyengar, 1987; Lee et al., 1991; Shields, 2001).

Furthermore, discussion of mental illness, the use of drugs, and consumption of alcohol increased over time. It is important to point out that these issues are present in the homeless population and they should be addressed. However, media discourse that focuses almost all of its attention on these particular problems runs the risk of influencing housed readers to associate homelessness with people that are seen as undeserving. As Shields (2001) points out, casting the homeless as deviants "re-affirms the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' – portraying the homeless as threats to the established order" (p.

216). If people without homes are cast as somehow different from the rest of us, the responsibility for helping people regain homes and stability falls away from society and to the people experiencing the condition.

Changing Conversation about Homelessness in the News

Results indicate that media coverage of homelessness shifted in key ways between the time periods studied. Regarding structural explanations of homelessness, changes across time did not follow quite the same pattern. In *The Oregonian*, mentions of structural causes increased significantly across time. This can be explained by a considerable increase in the number of articles mentioning the costs or availability of adequate and affordable housing in relation to the homeless crisis. As the cost of living in large cities continues to increase and housing availability becomes ever more restricted, the threat of losing housing is becoming salient to a larger portion of citizens all the time. An increase in discussion of housing in news media may reflect an understanding among city leaders and elites that homelessness could be a reality for anyone, not just a select group of people perceived as being somehow different from the rest of us. However, it is important to point out that, while discussion of housing increased, few articles discussed the other explanations for homelessness understood in the literature as pointing to structural societal causes of homelessness (Best, 2010; Buck et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1991).

This study also examined the prevalence of solutions posed in news coverage of homelessness. Politicians, homeless advocates, and other powerful figures who speak in the news about homelessness tend to be focused heavily on programs and policies

ostensibly designed to ameliorate homelessness (Lee et al., 1991). The solutions that get the most attention in media coverage are an important part of how the problem is constructed and who is responsible for finding solutions (Edelman, 1988). This study found that solutions to the problem of homelessness are consistently centered on housing, while other forms of aid and social services decreased in local news coverage.

The conversation regarding housing has also shifted. Shelters are still discussed in a considerable number of news stories, and stories about shelters still outweigh other forms of aid like tangible assistance in the form of food or clothing, job training, or medical services in modern coverage. This is consistent with prior research showing that temporary shelter accounts for a large portion of news media discourse regarding what is to be done about homelessness (Lee et al., 1991). However, whereas most discussion of housing in this sample focused on temporary or emergency shelter, prevalence of the subject decreased over time. At the same time, discussion of long-term housing solutions for homelessness increased since the late 1980s.

These findings suggest that media discourse shifted over time toward a discussion of homelessness solutions in local news media that emphasizes permanent solutions rather than temporary stop-gaps. This is important because, following the Mckinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act began allocating funds to programs designed to alleviate urban homelessness, government funding consistently prioritized temporary shelter programs (Toro & Warren, 1999) that act as more of a band-aid that gets people off of city streets than a real solution (Jencks, 1994). Even today, shelter programs continue to expand in cities while affordable housing is becoming ever scarcer (National Alliance to

End Homelessness, 2016). That is not to say that shelters should not exist. On the contrary, shelters provide crucial emergency assistance to people who need it and often provide links to other services for people. However, as Toro and Warren (1999) point out, allocation of a majority of finite resources on temporary emergency assistance makes it very difficult for government agencies to make headway on crucial affordable housing projects that are so crucial to keeping more people from becoming homeless and making homes available for those who are. Insofar as discussion in the media of homelessness reflects the views of powerful figures, this study suggests that more emphasis may be placed on increasing available housing for citizens who need it going forward than has been seen in the past.

Implications for Local News Reporting of Homelessness

This study provides evidence that local media accounts of homelessness differ in key ways from national news, which has been the primary focus of much of the previous literature on the subject (Buck et al., 2004; Lee et al., 1991; Shields, 2001). The trend of journalism in the United States has been to increasingly nationalize in scope and focus, breaking from discussion of particular events and moving toward discussion of general trends and analyses that are separated from the communities in which the events take place (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1998). However, the homelessness stories in this study were decidedly driven by local events such as the opening and closing of shelters, local election coverage, or other high-profile city events such as crime stories or the sweeping of homeless encampments. This is consistent with Best's (2010) findings that homelessness coverage in cities is driven by local happenings.

While most news platforms focus on the national, local newspapers remain an important avenue for understanding how social issues are understood and dealt with at the local level. When it comes to homelessness, local news is one of the few avenues for the issue to be transmitted to the public. National events regarding homelessness happen rarely, but cities face the issue continuously. This makes local news very important for transmitting information to the public about a complex social problem with many intersecting factors and solutions.

Nonetheless, local coverage of homelessness is generally confined to the perspectives of government officials and other powerful figures such as business and community leaders. Bennett (1996) points that the news focuses heavily on public officials as a means to hold them responsible. As a result, the homelessness conversation is restricted to high-profile topics for which these figures and the public are likely to be concerned. In this study, the factors for homelessness that received coverage were mostly public health concerns. City officials have a vested interest in the health and safety of their citizens. Issues that present themselves publicly, such as drunkenness or drug abuse, are bound to catch their attention. Meanwhile, underlying problems that can drive people to poverty and homelessness, such as rising fixed costs and stagnant wages, are largely absent from the discourse. On the other side of the issues, news accounts of solutions to the problem also tend to focus on housing, while other forms of support for the poor are far less prevalent.

The problem, then, is that news reporting of homelessness suffers from homogeneous perspectives. If only powerful city figures are given license to speak, the

discourse will be restricted to their limited understanding of the social problem as well as those parts of the problem that are seen by the public most often. Doing so ignores the many factors that contribute to urban poverty and can perpetuate the notion that homelessness is a separate issue from poverty that affects a restricted group of "deserving" people. As Edelman (1988) points out, the construction and definition of social issues has the potential to negate other, more deep-set problems. In order from homelessness to be represented in a more nuanced and representative way, more perspectives are needed in public discourse.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study did not examine the key issue of sourcing in the news. Journalists and news organizations typically do not make assertions on their own. Instead, they tell stories based on statements made by sources (Bennett, 1996). It is possible that the relative prominence of certain explanations and solutions for homelessness over others could be explained by the prominence of certain sources. Understanding where journalists get their material for publication is an important step in explaining how homogenized views of homelessness are transmitted to the public. Further studies should explore sourcing at the local news and national news level.

Another key limitation of this study is the lack of inter-coder reliability that made a number of variables unavailable for analysis. These coding categories were largely absent in newspaper articles from this sample, making coder training difficult. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the restricted number of analyzed coding categories could have deterred from adequately representing news coverage of

homelessness in local news. In addition, three coding categories were analyzed despite reliability coefficients that fell below the recommended .667 minimum. Inter-coder reliability is a crucial step in content analysis for checking against results biased by the researcher (Krippendorff, 2013). Future research should consider this and continue to develop the measures used in this study to ensure reliability.

On a related note, another limitation of this study relates to exhaustiveness of the measures. Since there are many causes of homelessness, it is impossible to derive a list of causes for research that is truly exhaustive. With this in mind, domestic violence came up as a cause of a number of cases of homelessness in the data. Further research should consider that fleeing abuse in the home is an important factor that drives many to the streets and work to include this as a cause variable.

Finally, a logical next step in research that looks at how homelessness is constructed is to examine public beliefs and views on who the homeless are. Work has been done in recent decades to assess public attitudes on what constitutes homelessness (see Iyengar, 1987; Lee et al., 1991). However, this should be revisited. If the public conversation around homelessness changes with the political and social climate, it is important to also examine how public views may have changed.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the conversation of homelessness in local news media changed over time. Coverage of structural factors increased between the 1980s and 2010s, mostly in relation to a lack of adequate and affordable housing in the cities these papers represent. The availability of housing is an important issue faced in West Coast

cities as rents continue to rise and density increases. This is further evidenced by an increasing conversation regarding permanent housing solutions. Acknowledging that homelessness should be part of the housing conversation may help the public and city leaders understand that homelessness threatens more than just a select group of people.

However, despite these notable changes, news media continue to portray homelessness as being bound to a specific group people who are routinely stigmatized and seen as somehow separate from the rest of society. Behaviors or conditions that can cast individuals as personally culpable for their condition are more prevalent in modern news coverage than they were in the 1980s. Though it is important to acknowledge that mental health issues and the abuse of substances are contributing factors that need to be considered, they should not be the only characteristics that define people who are homeless. To do so reinforces the belief that people who are homeless are different and, therefore, deserve to be homeless by virtue of their own failings rather than the failings of society. This can also be seen in the gestures made by city leaders that often focus more on reducing the visibility of the homeless rather than taking real steps to empower people to get themselves permanently off the streets.

It is important to understand that the paths to homelessness are complex and intimately tied to deep-set systemic problems of poverty. People lose their homes for countless reasons, many of which could happen to any one of us. The reality, then, is that there is no real difference between the houseless and the housed. The only distinguishing characteristic of homelessness is that these people lack property. Modern news media play a vital role in communicating this understanding to the public. Though some

systemic issues appear more often in modern coverage than in the past, this study shows that news media continue to perpetuate the notion that homelessness is tied to personal failings of individuals rather than a problem that requires public attention and action.

References

Anderson, E. A., & Koblinsky, S. A. (1995). Homeless policy: The need to speak to families. *Family Relations, 44*(1), 13–18. doi: 10.2307/584736

Barnhurst, K. G., & Mutz, D. (1998). American journalism and the decline in event-centered reporting. *Journal of Communication*, *47*(4), 27–53.

Bennett, W. L. (1996). An introduction to journalism norms and representations of politics. *Political Communication*, *13*(4), 373–384. doi: 10.1080/10584609.1996.9963126

Best, R. (2010). Situation or social problem: The infuence of events on media coverage of homelessness. *Social Problems*, *57*(1), 74–91. doi: 10.1525/sp.2010.57.1.74

Blau, J. (1992). *The visible poor: Homelessness in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Buck, P. O., Toro, P. A., & Ramos, M. A. (2004). Media and professional interest in homelessness over 30 years (1974–2003). *Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy*, *4*(1), 151–171. doi: 10.1111/j.1530-2415.2004.00039.x

Bunis, W. K., Yancik, A., & Snow, D. A. (1996). The cultural patterning of sympathy toward the homeless and other victims of misfortune. *Social Problems*, *43*(4), 387–402. doi: 10.2307/3096951

Cohen, B. C. (1963). *The press and foreign policy.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, D. T. (2015). *Population trends in incorporated places: 2000 to 2013* (Report No. P25-1142). U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from

https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1142.pdf

Crane, M., Byrne, K., Fu, R., Lipmann, B., Mirabelli, F., Rota-Bartelink, A., … Warnes, A. M. (2005). The causes of homelessness in later life: Findings from a 3-nation study. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *60*(3), S152–S159. doi: 10.1093/geronb/60.3.S152

Dearing, J. W., & Rogers, E. M. (1996). *Agenda-setting*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Edelman, M. J. (1988). *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gallagher, L. (2013). *The end of the suburbs: Where the American dream is moving*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin.

Gans, H. J. (2004). *Deciding what's news: a study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Hayes, A. F., & Krippendorff, K. (2007). Answering the Call for a Standard Reliability Measure for Coding Data. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *1*(1), 77–89. doi: 10.1080/19312450709336664

Helfer, L. (2016). Media effects on politicians: An individual-level political agenda-setting experiment. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *21*(2), 233–252. doi: 10.1177/1940161215627461

Henry, M., Shivji, A., Sousa, T. de, Cohen, R., Khadduri, J., & Culhane, D. P. (2015). The 2015 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness. United States Department of Housing

and Urban Development: Office of Community Planning and Development. Retrieved from https://works-bepress-com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/dennis_culhane/192/

Hewitt, C. (1996). Estimating the number of homeless: Media misrepresentation... *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *18*(4), 431.

"Homelessness in America" (2016). National Coalition for the Homeless. Retrieved October 21, 2016, from http://nationalhomeless.org/about-homelessness/

Iyengar, S. (1987). Television news and citizens' explanations of national affairs. *The American Political Science Review*, *81*(3), 815–831. doi: 10.2307/1962678

Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jencks, C. (1994). *The homeless*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Kendall, D. E. (2005). *Framing class: Media representations of wealth and poverty in America*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kessler, R. C., Mcgonagle, K. A., Zhao, S., Nelson, C. B., Hughes, M., Eshleman, S., … Kendler, K. S. (1994). Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States: Results from the national comorbidity survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, *51*(1), 8–9. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.1994.03950010008002

Klite, P., Bardwell, R. A., & Salzman, J. (1997). Local TV news: Getting away with murder. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *2*(2), 102–112. doi: 10.1177/1081180X97002002009

Krippendorff, K. (2006). Reliability in content analysis: Some common misconceptions and recommendations. *Human Communication Research*, *30*(3), 411–433. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.2004.tb00738.x

Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Lee, B. A., Link, B. G., & Toro, P. A. (1991). Images of the homeless: Public views and media messages. *Housing Policy Debate*, *2*(3), 649–682. doi: 10.1080/10511482.1991.9521068

Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010). The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 501–521.

Madden, J. F. (2003). The Changing Spatial Concentration of Income and Poverty among Suburbs of Large US Metropolitan Areas. *Urban Studies*, *40*(3), 481–503. doi: 10.1080/0042098032000053888

Manning, J. (2015, September 22). Working class priced out, kicked out in new Portland housing boom. *The Oregonian*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/watchdog/index.ssf/2015/09/post_19.html

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *36*(2), 176–187.

Mitchell, A., & Holcomb, J. (2016, June 15). State of the News Media 2016. Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 15, 2016, from http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/state-of-the-news-media-2016/

Mutz, D. C. (1998). *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016). 2016 State Of Homelessness. Retrieved from http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016

Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Pascale, C. M. (2005). There's no place like home: The discursive creation of homelessness. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *5*(2), 250–268. doi: 10.1177/1532708605274558

Patterson, T. E. (2000). *Doing well and doing good: How soft news and critical journalism are shrinking the news audience and weakening democracy-and what news outlets can do about it*. Cambridge, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy.

Paulsen, D. J. (2002). Wrong side of the tracks: Exploring the role of newspaper coverage of homicide in socially constructing dangerous places. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, *9*(3), 113–127.

Perl, L., Bagalman, E., Fernandez-Alcantara, A. L., Heisler, E. J., McCallion, G., McCarthy, F. X., & Sacco, L. N. (2015). *Homelessness: Targeted Federal Programs and Recent Legislation* (Report No. RL30442). Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL30442.pdf

Prior, M. (2005). News vs. entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gaps in political knowledge and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science, 49*(3), 577–592. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2005.00143.x

Richter, S., Burns, K. K., Chaw-Kant, J., Calder, M., Mogale, S., Goin, L., … Schnell. (2011). Homelessness coverage in major Canadian newspapers, 1987 - 2007. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 36*(4), 619–635.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (1998). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Schneider, B. (2012). Sourcing homelessness: How journalists use sources to frame homelessness. *Journalism, 13*(1), 71–86. doi: 10.1177/1464884911421573

Shields, T. G. (2001). Network news construction of homelessness: 1980-1993. *Communication Review, 4*(2), 193–218.

Sosin, M. R. (2003). Explaining adult homelessness in the US by stratification or situation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 13*(2), 91–104. doi: 10.1002/casp.716

"S&P/Case-Shiller 20-city composite home price index" (2017, February). S&P Dow Jones Indices. Retrieved from https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SPCS20RSA

Takahashi, L. M. (1996). A decade of understanding homelessness in the USA: From characterization to representation. *Progress in Human Geography, 20*(3), 291–310. doi: 10.1177/030913259602000301

The coming collapse of the middle class with Elizabeth Warren (2007, June 11). University of California Television. Retrieved from

http://www.uctv.tv/shows/The-Coming-Collapse-of-the-Middle-Class-Higher-Risks-Lower-Rewards-and-a-Shrinking-Safety-Net-with-Elizabeth-Warren-12620

Toro, P. A., & Warren, M. G. (1999). Homelessness in the United States: Policy considerations. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *27*(2), 119–136.

Waldman, S. (2011). *Information needs of communities: The changing media landscape in a broadband age*. Diane Publishing.

Yanovitzky, I. (2002). Effects of news noverage on policy attention and actions: A closer look into the media-policy connection. *Communication Research*, *29*(4), 422–451. doi: 10.1177/0093650202029004003

Appendix A

Include/Exclude Criteria

Data inclusion procedure:

1. skim article; determine if any exclusion criteria (below) are met
2. IF article is to be excluded, **cut** and **paste** into new document
3. Number articles **not** removed by exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria; remove articles IF:

1. No mention is made of homelessness or homeless people
2. The article speaks about someone being “homeless” as a result of a disaster (house fire, earthquake, tornado, etc.)
3. The article speaks about homelessness in another country other than the United States
4. Homelessness is mentioned only as part of a political agenda and specific policies or actions are not discussed (e.g., Charlie Hales vows to “deal with the homeless problem”, etc.)

Appendix B

Coding instructions

Coding unit: One complete sentence. More than one code **can be applied** to the same sentence. However, if a single sentence mentions a topic more than once, it should still be coded only once.

Coding procedure:

Newspaper articles are typically organized one topic at a time. It is very common that large portions of an article will not address homelessness at all. These sections may mention topics that fit within our coding categories. Do not code them. Since our purpose is to code topics that are expressed in relation to homelessness, code sentences that **mention homelessness specifically** or **refer back to previous discussion of homelessness**. Use only the information presented within the article to decide what to code.

Homeless signifiers (NOTE: there may be others, but most will be one of these): homeless, houseless, vagrant, transient, street (people, youths, etc.), campers, squatters

Code sentences IF:

1. One or more topic is mentioned in relation to HOMELESSNESS
2. An already-coded topic is specifically referred to again by naming it (e.g., "Baloney Joe's shelter for homeless men") or referring to it through the use of pronouns or descriptors (e.g., "the shelter" or "they are mentally ill")
3. The sentence refers to a homeless character or homelessness in general and talks about a cause or solution
4. For personal reasons, topic variables are presented as characteristics of homelessness (i.e., they do not have to be specified as having CAUSED someone's homelessness to be coded)

DO NOT code sentences IF:

1. A topic variable is mentioned in an article, but it is not EXPLICITLY linked to homelessness (e.g., discussions of poverty)
2. A characteristic of a person is described but the person is not homeless
3. Statements address causes or solutions in a way that challenges them or directly calls them false.

Appendix C

Coding Categories

Category 1: Structural Reasons for homelessness

Housing: any sentence that presents the lack of housing, the cost of living, losing homes, or the unavailability of affordable homes in relation to homelessness in general or a particular instance of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1 –* "Compassion doesn't mean ignoring the fact that homelessness encompasses a wide range of people: families priced out of housing…"
>
> *Ex. 2 –* "Kemp said the "gentrification" of many core city areas has eliminated much of the housing that had been available to low-income people."

Economic Conditions: any sentence that speaks about the economy (economic downturn, depression, poor economy, not enough jobs, etc.) in relation to homelessness in general or a particular instance of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1 –* "Though the economy is rebounding, older workers are not, said Pilot Project's Executive Director Susan Emmons. Many can't find jobs. Those who do are offered part-time positions."
>
> *Ex. 2 –* "The number of women on the streets is rising, partly because of the recession and partly an unintended consequence of…"

Deinstitutionalization: any sentence that describes the decline of psychiatric hospitals or other in-patient mental health facilities in relation to homelessness in general or a specific instance of homelessness. This includes the closure or replacement of these facilities, lack of space in psychiatric hospitals, etc.

> *Ex. 1 –* "Instead, Kulongoski tried to balance a recession-wracked budget partly by cutting state outpatient treatment in half and wiping out residential care for adults. The result, the agency warned legislators, would be that 'many individuals will not receive vital services, with the end result of increased crime, homelessness and premature death.'"

Government Action: any sentence that points out government action or inaction in relation to homelessness in general or a specific instance of homelessness. This includes lack of government spending on programs for the poor (welfare, social security, etc.), enactment of laws that are framed as leading to homelessness, tax increases, etc.

> *Ex. 1 –* "He contends that 4.3 million needy families are being helped on $13.6 billion compared with 3.3 million on a $33.4 billion budget when the administration took office. Such city organizations as the Housing Authority of Portland, which deal not so much with cold statistics as with real people needing

> real roofs over their heads, are hardly convinced that they are getting more housing for less money, as Pierce's figures would indicate."

Job Loss: any sentence that speaks about the loss of employment, layoffs, etc. in relation to homelessness in general or a specific instance of homelessness. This includes unemployment statistics/information along with specific discussion of a homeless person/family losing work.

> *Ex. 1* – "She said she wants to work but hasn't been able to find a job."

> *Ex. 2* – "The study said there is no typical homeless person. Some are simply unemployed…"

Health Costs: any sentence that speaks about the cost of hospitalization, medical treatment, mental health treatment, etc. in relation to homelessness in general or a particular instance of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1* – "The average homeless person visits the ER five times a year. An average visit to the ER costs about $3,500 in un-reimbursed expenses."

Category 2: Personal Reasons attributed to homelessness

Mental Illness: any sentence that describes a person identified as homelessness as "mentally ill" or "has mental health issues". This also includes general description of mental illness as characteristic of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1* – "Downtown's venerable Hotel Churchill, which opened 100 years ago to cater to Panama-California Exposition goers, is getting a $17 million makeover to serve homeless veterans and the mentally ill."

Physical Illness/disability: any sentence that describes a person identified as homeless as having a physical illness or disability. This also includes general description of physical illness as characteristic of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1* – "The current limits are too low, O'Connor said yesterday. Disabled and ill homeless people face life-threatening conditions on many winter nights, even in our relatively mild climate."

Personal Choice: any sentence that mentions a person choosing to live without a home. This includes "the homeless lifestyle" and other mentions of individuals or groups that are homeless by choice.

> *Ex. 1* – "There are some who choose to be on the streets," he said.

Family/household Breakup: any sentence that describes the loss of a family member (death or separation), being kicked out of a home, divorce, or other situations in relation to a specific instance of homelessness or homelessness in general.

> *Ex. 1* – "Many of those who would qualify for the shelter are homeless because divorce, separation or the sudden death of a spouse has stripped them of financial resources, according to Mary Lou Sauerborn, director of the Ecumenical Service Center, the agency that will screen applicants."

Laziness: any sentence that describes homeless people as lazy or as not wanting to work or "contribute". This also includes any statement like "just get a job" or other similar statements.

> *Ex. 1* – "Nimblett says he didn't associate with the park's other homeless people. He felt no empathy for them, only disgust and anger. "Most of them were lazy. They felt that society owed them a living, even when they were already getting something.""

Alcohol: any sentence that discusses alcoholism among people who are homeless, describes an individual identifies as homeless as having a drinking problem or as an alcoholic, or any mention of the consumption of alcohol in relation to homelessness in general or a specific instance of homelessness.

> *Ex. 1* – "To understand how health reform is supposed to improve health outcomes of all kinds while reducing costs, consider the case of a homeless Multnomah County man with an alcohol problem as well as schizophrenia."

Drugs: any sentence that mentions "substance abuse", mentions the use of a particular substance, or labels people identified as homeless as "drug addicts."

> *Ex. 1* – "In contrast, the U.S. Conference of Mayors estimated that 77 percent of the homeless are unemployed, 34 percent are substance abusers and 25 percent are mentally ill."

Lack of Talent: any sentence that points out a lack in education, job skills, or talent of a person identified as homeless or the homeless in general.

> *Ex. 1* – "Other problems such as inadequate education, lack of job skills, personality disorders or the trauma from sudden poverty as a career collapses may outweigh the appeal…"

<u>Category 3: Solutions given for homelessness</u>

Short-term Shelters: any sentence that mentions or talks about an organizational homeless shelter for that is temporary. This includes emergency shelters, missions,

discussion of building new shelter buildings, and description of organizations that run or maintain shelters.

> *Ex. 1 –* "Additionally, some local welfare agencies are following court orders to shelter the homeless by making emergency shelter payments, which have given rise to some high-cost welfare hotels."

Long-term/Transitional Housing: any sentence that mentions or talks about long-term housing as a solution. This includes transitional housing programs such as "housing first", rent-controlled housing for low-income (if identified as for homeless in the article), group homes (youth), and other solutions meant to provide permanent housing. This also includes statements that "there should be more" or "there is not enough" affordable housing for people who are homeless. Articles that talk about "housing programs" that provide shelter, but that stipulate a temporary period of time (e.g., "residents will stay for no more than 60 days"), should NOT be coded as long-term housing.

> *Ex. 1 –* "The summit follows City Hall's announcement last month of the Housing our Heroes campaign, a $12-million effort to get housing for 1,000 veterans in need of shelter by providing incentives to landlords."

Monetary Aid: any sentence that mentions or talks about direct monetary aid. This includes government welfare programs and food stamps as well as non-profit or advocacy action meant to get money in the hands of people identified as homeless.

> *Ex. 1 –* "Out of a total of 147 homeless people who stayed at the Athens for at least a part of the winter, 104 improved their lot in a significant way… and others got signed up for food stamps and welfare."

Food/clothing assistance: any sentence that mentions or talks about tangible assistance given to people identified as homeless. This includes food banks/community services, non-profit clothing donation programs, meals-on-wheels, etc.

> *Ex. 1 –* "The North County Interfaith Council wants to operate a 10-bed shelter for single homeless men, a food bank and kitchen in the building."

> *Ex. 2 –* "Volunteer Angie West offers clothing to Jose Hernandez during the third annual Christmas effort to aid the homeless at Plaza Hall in the Community Concourse."

Personal Charity: any sentence that mentions or describes a personal act of charity. This includes all stories of individuals giving money, food, or items to "beggars" as well as other individual acts of kindness.

> *Ex. 1 –* "When the celebrated actress and comedian goes shopping in her Los Angeles neighborhood, she buys food for street women she knows."

Job provisioning/training: any sentence that mentions or describes job training programs, employment services, labor organizations, or employers giving jobs to people identified as homeless.

> *Ex. 1* – "Ron Morrison, state Department of Social and Health Services and a member of the homeless committee, said the homeless need more than just housing. He said they also need food and jobs."

Education: any sentence that mentions or describes educational services such as GED programs, adult education, or enrollment in educational institutions for people identified as homeless. This category also includes discussion of school outreach to increase access of homeless students to school.

> *Ex. 1* – "And not just an emergency shelter. An advocacy center. A supportive community and programs to assist you with job placement, education and transitional housing."

Medical Services: any sentences that mentions or describes physical or mental health institutions in relation to the homeless in general or specific instances of homelessness. This includes funding for medical/mental health treatment, opening up space in medical facilities, financial aid for medical treatment, drug or alcohol treatment centers, etc.

> *Ex. 1* – "He said he secured an extra $5 million from the 2013 Legislature for housing people in treatment. But that money was, in fact, for housing the mentally ill."